

Translating gender ambiguity in literatura: The case of *Written on the Body*

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Recibido: 19.01.2023

Revisado: 22.01.2023

Aceptado: 31.01.2023

Abstract: The present work analyzes the difficulties resulting from the absence of gender marks in English when translating towards Spanish. To do so, the novel *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson – a masterpiece in which the identity of the leading character will be kept in strict ambiguity – would be studied taking into consideration aspects connected to the feminist and queer theories. Several extracts from both the original text and the translation by Encarna Gómez Castejón in 1988 will be exhaustively compared to evaluate the correctness and naturality of the translation. Additionally, if considered necessary, an alternative translation will be proposed.

Keywords: gender translation, Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*, *Escrito en el cuerpo*

La traducción de la ambigüedad de género en la literatura: el caso de *Written on the Body*

Resumen: El presente trabajo analiza las dificultades que supone la ausencia de marcas de género en la lengua inglesa a la hora de realizar una traducción hacia el español. Para este fin, se empleará como objeto de estudio la novela *Written on the Body* de Jeanette Winterson, obra en la cual se conserva deliberadamente la identidad del personaje principal en la más estricta ambigüedad. En primer lugar, se realizará una exhaustiva comparativa de diversos extractos entre el original y la traducción realizada por Encarna Gómez Castejón en 1988 y, posteriormente, si se considerase necesario, se propondrá una traducción alternativa de los mismos. Para lograr todo lo anterior, se tendrán en consideración algunos aspectos ligados a las teorías traductológicas feministas y *queer*.

Palabras clave: traducción y género, Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*, *Escrito en el cuerpo*.

Contents: 1. The autor: Jeanette Winterson. 1.1. *Written on the Body*. 2. The translator: Encarna Gómez Castejón. 3. Gender translation. 4. Linguistics and translation analysis of *Written on the Body*. 4.1. Alternative strategies. 5. Conclusions.

1. The author: Jeanette Winterson

Since the practice of a proper literary translation would be impossible without previous in-depth documentation about the original writer and their work, it has been deemed vital to present to the readers a succinct summary of the biography and the literary tendencies followed by Winterson. Similarly, for those who have not had the pleasure of enjoying the reading of *Written on the Body*, the most essential aspects of the plot and the writing of this masterpiece are presented concisely.

Jeanette Winterson, one of the most prominent and controversial writers in the contemporary British panorama, was born in Manchester in 1959. As described in her memoirs *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, she was given in adoption to a highly religious middle-class couple, John and Constance, from Accrington, a city in Lancashire County. Despite her adoptive family's desires, who intended for her to become a missionary for the Pentecostal Church, Winterson received secular schooling which greatly deviated from the biblical education that was conceived apt for her. Furthermore, to illustrate her adoptive family's doctrinal obsession, Onega (2006: 4) has pinpointed that they only possessed six books, out of which half of them were copies of religious content. Nonetheless, thanks to learning the English language at school and reading the scarce non-religious novels at home, the young Winterson experienced her first approach to creative literature.

However, things truly fell apart when Winterson turned sixteen. On the one hand, the author ascertained that John and Constance were, in fact, not her real parents. On the other hand, her adoptive family discovered she had intercourse with another woman, and thus they and the community they belonged to repudiated her. As a result, she moved with her English teacher, who helped her persevere in the study of language and literature, and worked different jobs to earn a living. As explained by Asensio (2003: 19), these events, even if excruciatingly painful, would cement some of the most recurrent topics in her future novels, such as love, religion, women and the pursuit of identity.

Fortunately for her, her linguistic capabilities were unquestionable and she managed to enroll in English Language and Literature at Oxford, where she studied from 1978 to 1981. These years meant a milestone in her career

since not only did she have the opportunity to get familiarized with English literary traditions, but also found inspiration amongst some of the creations of Woolf, Eliot, Joyce and Yeats.

Once graduated, she moved to London and worked in different jobs connected to advertising and journalism for brief periods until she was offered the chance to work in the Roundhouse Theater. The constant flow of creativity and her eagerness to express her view of the world led Winterson to apply to one of the most flourishing feminist publishing houses of the end of the century: Pandora. Even though she was not hired, she was encouraged to persist in her dream of becoming a writer by the editor-in-chief, Philippa Brewster. Merely two months after this initial interview, Brewster published *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), the first wintersonian novel. According to Onega (2006: 5), this masterpiece acquired such success that it was awarded the Whitbread Book Award for First Novel and it was quickly adapted to the silver screen in 1990. Therefore, both occurrences, and many others, could be used as a testimony of the warm welcome that the author received from the public and the critics.

Many other narrations followed *Oranges*, although not all of them had the same reception among the public and literary critics. A case in point would be *Boating for Beginners* (1985), which not only was ignored by the vast majority of readers but also failed to be included in Winterson's webpage as one of her books. his exception being mentioned, the following novels she published kept the initial momentum, namely *The Passion* (1987) and *Sexing The Cherry* (1990), and consecrated her as an eminence in contemporary literary production in Great Britain. The aforementioned texts were also considered deserving of prizes, specifically the John Llewelyn Rhys Prize awarded to the former and the E. M. Forster Award given to the latter. Additionally, both of them are considered the introduction of Winterson to the international market thanks to their translation and commercialization.

Nevertheless, the 90s would mean the start of a much more obscure and turbulent era for Winterson. The downfall of such a beloved and renowned author began with the publication of *Written on The Body* (1992), a novel she claimed to be her best so far. Unfortunately, this opinion was not shared by many readers and critics, despite maintaining the same level of quality in her pieces. In fact, some of the experts who had previously praised her work became her main detractors. It did not help either that during these years she was depicted as a conflictive and controversial character in the media due to alleged sexual scandals and certain misbehavior. Likewise, other works which did not receive the appreciation they should have include *Art & Lies* (1994), *Gut Symmetries* (1997) and *The World and Other Places*

(1998), as well as the essay collection *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (1995).

The arrival of the new century also involved a new opportunity for Winterson. After retiring to Spitalfields to avoid the media spotlight, she published one of her most emblematic novels: *The Powerbook* (2000). Since then, her work has remained stable and continuous with novels such as *Lighthousekeeping* (2005), *Weight* (2006), *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011), *Frankissstein* (2019), *12 Bytes* (2021), amongst many others. Also, it should be highlighted that she has experimented with other literary genres such as short stories for children or movie scripts and that she has been tutoring the MA Creative Writing at the University of Manchester since 2013.

Considering all this, Andermahr (2007:1) captures the essence of her work and summarizes all her efforts in a very appropriate metaphor:

The reception of Winterson's work in the print could be represented, in appropriately Wintersonian terms, as a protracted love story: it began in the mid-1980s on the publication of her first novel with a coup de foudre, an instantaneous falling in love, and was followed by a lengthy honeymoon period throughout the 1980s. Then, in the early 1990s, the relationship hit the buffers and became, notwithstanding a few voices of support, an affair of increased mutual disillusionment and recrimination throughout the 1990s. In the 2000s, some of the magic returned and by 2004 [...] the relationship between Winterson and her critical readers appeared to be finally back in track.

Before ending this brief contextualization about the studied author, it appears necessary to mention the existing disagreements regarding the association of the writer to a specific literary movement or ideology. This categorization becomes more challenging since, as Pykett (1998:53) indicates, Winterson herself has denied any sort of label referred to her work.

Firstly, there are opposing opinions on whether the author belongs to Modernism or Postmodernism, given that her works do present characteristics associated with both currents. According to Andermahr (2009:16-19), on the one hand, "Winterson is clearly a modernist in the sense that not only is she an experimenter with fictional forms, but she views art as an ultimate value". On the other hand, "she is also indubitably a postmodernist engaged in a playful and parodic rescripting of popular and canonical genres, and in the construction of reality as precisely an intricate web of fictional worlds". As a result, despite Winterson confessing to being inspired by late modernist authors, literary critics highlight her postmodernist metanarratives which focus on groups of people who have traditionally been

misrepresented or underrepresented in literature. Another point that is frequently used to support her pertinence to the postmodernist elite is the exploration of the deconstruction of opposed situations, for example, masculinity and femininity.

In a similar vein, Winterson tends to be associated with feminist and lesbian or queer writing. It is undeniable that within her works a wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities are represented, combined with noticeable independence from men and denaturalization of heterosexuality and patriarchy, all of which could be associated either with the second and third wave of feminism or with LGBTQI+ rights. One interesting opinion is found in Doan (1994: 153), who advocates that the feminist and queer wintersonian spirit can be observed through the deconstruction of traditional binarisms and the creation of fluid and dynamic spaces to express sexual and gender plurality. Similarly, Morera (2014: 260) defines Winterson as a lesbian writer together with Marilyn French, Sarah Waters or Emma Donoghue, given the discovery of their homosexuality in what she denominates “coming out novels”.

1.1. *Written on the Body*

As it was previously mentioned, *Written on the Body* was published in 1992 and it has been marked by several critics as the starting point of the wintersonian “dark years”. This novel narrates the story of an unnamed and undescribed leading character and narrative voice, focusing on sexual intercourse and the development of relationships. And, even though the reason the book was initially criticized was the lack of characterization, it is precisely the inexistence of a limited portrayal of the main character which has attracted the attention of many researchers. For instance, in the field of translation, experts have discussed viable techniques to represent the said character in languages that require the usage of grammatical genders, such as Italian.

All this being explained, in the present section, the plot will be summarized and the most relevant aspects of the work will be highlighted. Additionally, given the lack of a defined gender, it must be clarified that the pronoun “they” will be used throughout the document to avoid misgendering the protagonist.

The first pages of the book are focused on the early relationships the main character forged with different women, which tended not to be long-lasting given that the central character felt an attraction to married women who would soon repent from their adultery. It is a period when emotions were not as relevant when the character merely sought sexual satisfaction. Although, because of the fear of dying alone, the narrator meets Jacqueline

and tries to foster a stable relationship even if there was no sexual attraction whatsoever. The couple lives a period of a mundane routine negatively affected by monotony until they both meet Louise, an outstanding woman who, despite being married to Elgin, arouses the leading character. After overcoming several obstacles, Louise and the protagonist build a fairytale-like relationship that once more did not endure due to Louise being diagnosed with leukemia. Knowing this, the main character leaves Louise and abandons the city, hoping she would return to Elgin, who had a better chance of treating her. Once again alone, the hero becomes obsessed with medical treaties and research and tries to reconstruct the sickly body of their lover through poems. In the end, the leading character realizes that it was not as heroic as they thought to leave Louise and so they return to find her. Unfortunately, they do not achieve their quest and return home defeated while recalling other ex-partners who they failed, both male and female. Once back home, it seems that the main character finds Louise there waiting, but the reader cannot be certain that this happened.

According to the critics, the central section is the most conspicuous, given that the leading character analyzes anatomically and poetically the body of the lover to understand her suffering. To a certain extent, the writer implies that women's bodies are texts that can be read, written, interpreted, translated, etc. What is more, these pages become a compendium in which the female body is praised and in which traditional views that conceive it as a mere object are deconstructed. According to Front (2009:66), "the desire to decipher the partner's body, to anatomize that territory is an attempt to understand the lover through learning about their past and their identity". As a result, the author achieves a new usage of language that reinvents the conception of romance as a genre and as a life experience.

Nonetheless, for the present study, the most relevant attribute would be the creation and inclusion of a supposedly bisexual narrator who is lacking any clear assignation of gender. Winterson enhances this experience by purposely keeping to the bare minimum the details concerning the physical or psychological attributes of the said character while inserting extremely sexed stereotypes. Even so, despite all her efforts, when most professionals have tackled the issue, they have forcefully attributed a gender to the character, usually leaning to the feminine side of the spectrum. This ascription may be a direct result of the influence of the writer herself, a lesbian who publicly has criticized patriarchy and who usually incorporates some autobiographical elements into her works. Contrarily, other experts have affirmed that it may be the case of either a bisexual or a closeted homosexual male pretending to be heterosexual, due to the presence of some attitudes that tend to be associated with toxic masculinity, such as

domestic violence. According to Makinen (2005:121), “on closer inspection, it is the stereotypes about femininity that are challenged directly, while masculine attitudes and masks, such as hard-boiled insouciance, are more humorously invoked”. Considering all this, the confusion that this ambiguity generates creates the perfect scenario to question the classical conceptions of masculinity and femininity, gender and sexuality.

The last characteristic worth mentioning consists in the inclusion of feminist and queer values in the narration, thanks to which the ruling heteropatriarchy of the epoch is denounced. Onega (2006:114) assures that, as it is stated in the title, “*Written on the Body* is a self-conscious experiment in *écriture féminine*, carried out by an autodiegetic author-narrator, whose aim [...] is no longer self-discovery, but rather self-construction”. Similarly, the non-gendered narrator would emerge as a crucial element when challenging the strict categories of sex, sexuality and gender, plus it allowed marginalized or ignored bodies to be represented in literature in the blank space of the leading character. In this sense, the contribution of Bradway (2015:186) attracts attention, because instead of spotlighting the lack of traits as many others, places the focus on the multiplicity of possibilities:

By not “tell[ing] the whole story,” Winterson forces readers to interpellate the “true” identity of the narrator’s body. This formal conceit underscores that the body has no essential identity—it is an “accumulation” of signs, of cultural inscriptions that encode the body like a palimpsest. For this reason, critics have read *Written on the Body* as a paradigmatic text of contemporary queer fiction.

All things being considered, it should appear evident to any expert in the translation field that the translation of such a text is no easy task. Not only does it intertwine concepts linked to the feminist and queer movements that need to be preserved, but also, depending on the language combination, the transfer of English nouns and adjectives should retain both the original meaning and the characteristic ambiguity.

2. The translator: Encarna Gómez Castejón

If something cannot be denied about the translation profession is that the professionals within this field tend to be overshadowed. However, to challenge oblivion and to provide further context on the translation process, it has been considered convenient to include some information on the background of the translator in the present research.

Unfortunately, as a result of the aforementioned overshadowing, not much information can be found about Encarna Gómez Castejón, the

translator who was assigned the transfer of *Written on The Body* into the Spanish language. According to her webpage¹, she is a Spanish critic, editor, writer and translator who graduated in Philosophy and Psychology from the University of Murcia. During her career, she has balanced her translator duties with several other positions, such as editor-in-chief in *El Urogallo*, screenwriter in *Señas de identidad* and literary critic in several newspapers. Her translations include an extensive list of French writers, including Paul Valéry, Michel Tournier, Jean Frémon, Emile Zola, Michel Houellebecq and Pascal Quignard, among others. Nevertheless, her aforementioned webpage fails to mention her efforts regarding other languages, despite the inclusion of an image of a singular English novel, namely *Written on The Body*. Despite this, thanks to her careful work she has been nominated for some awards, like the “Premio Nacional de Traducción” for *El vagabundo inmóvil* and the “Premio Interallié” for *Windows on the World*, and has been chosen “Best Translation of the Year” by the readers of the magazine *Qué leer* for *Las partículas elementales*.

3. Gender translation

In the following theoretical section, a sufficient explanation will be provided about the challenges that the translation of gender ambiguity entails and the possible resources the translator possesses to overcome those difficulties. Also, even though they are not the basis of the present study, a few broad brushstrokes will be added regarding notions about feminist translation and queer translation, since, as has been previously mentioned, the aim of the author was none other than subverting some of the canonical ideas of sexuality and gender defended by heteropatriarchy and both ideologies could be easily integrated into the conversation on gender.

The concept of gender translation is intrinsically connected to the feminist movement, concretely to the feminist translation that was developed in Quebec during the 80s and 90s by experimentalist writers, such as Bersianik or Brossard, and translations, like Godard, Lotbinière-Harwood or von Flotow. According to Castro (2008:288), these experts considered translation “a school of thought that defended the incorporation of feminist ideology to articulate new ways of expression and to dismantle the patriarchal burden both in language and in society”. Thus, following these ideas, many translators denounced the vast number of works written by women that had fallen into oblivion, pinpointed past translations that

¹ See <http://www.estrellasonora.com/inicionew.html>

misrepresented or ignored the marked feminist undertone of the original text and resolved to change the image of womanhood through translation employing non-sexist proposals of linguistic transfers. Therefore, both the gender and the feminist translation should be understood as a new translation perspective that, while preserving the traditional goals and procedures, accounts for the existing gender inequality and intends to combat it.

Santaemilia (2013:6-9) affirms that this revolutionary proposition was cemented on five main pillars: 1) the theoretical postulates associated with the second wave of feminism; 2) the literary trend called *écriture au féminin* initiated by Hélène Cixous in 1975; 3) the cultural and ideological shift experienced within the translation field of research; 4) the poststructuralist movement; 5) and the deconstruction of the patriarchy. Additionally, the publication of *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (1996) by Sherry Simon y *Translation and Gender: Translating in the Era of Feminism* (1997) by Luise von Flotow are highlighted.

Likewise, the embracement of gender in translation, as well as different sciences and disciplines, was favored by the queer turn of the 90s, motivated by the theories proposed by Judith Butler (1990:337-338) on biological sex, gender identity and gender performativity. According to this expert, even if a person is assigned a sex at birth according to the sexual organs the individual possesses naturally, the gender they portray can fluctuate since the latter is a sociocultural construct resulting from the actions that are performed by the said individual and the stereotypes that affect a given sex. Although, the most revolutionary contribution is the conception of a possible difference between gender identity, the gender the individual identifies as, and gender performativity, the actions that the same individual undertakes to portray gender. Therefore, gender is reenvisioned as a spectrum and not as a binomial and the comprehension of manhood and womanhood was widened, thus accepting a wider range of realities.

With such a strong theoretical basis, not much time passed before the incipient understanding of gender through translation disembarked in Europe. For instance, Brufau (2011:183-184) explains that the analysis of old translations excelled in Spain with strategies to bring women to the fore and reflections on the consequences of using gender translation as well as new translations that could incorporate a gender perspective. The impact was such that other official languages within the Iberian Peninsula, such as Catalan, Basque or Galician soon made their contributions.

However, no matter where they are conducted, researches on gender translation, feminist translation and queer translation coincide signaling a

common problem: the complexity of transferring linguistic gender. As Castro (2008:291-293) argues, while the difficulty is reduced when both the original and the target language grammaticalize gender similarly, it becomes more challenging when the pair of languages conceive gender differently, for example in the case of English and Spanish. In this sense, two cases should be emphasized over the rest: the rewriting of source texts codifying gender in a way that is impossible to reproduce in the target language and the usage of a “false” generic masculine. Similarly, the “Male-As-Norm Principle” complicated the determination of gender given that the masculine gender tends to be attributed to entities that lack gender marks unless they are affected by social or cultural stereotypes.

When presented with any of the aforementioned problems, the procedure would be to apply the habitual translation strategies. Yet, if they were ineffective, the experts in the field of gender translation have proposed some alternatives. For example, von Flotow (1991:74) distinguishes three specific strategies to be applied to feminist translation: 1) supplementing; 2) prefacing and footnoting; 3) and hijacking, all of which can be either applied individually or collectively. Albeit the former and the latter involve direct modifications within the text, prefacing and footnoting opt for changes that would not alter the original work of the author. It should also be noted that hijacking becomes the most aggressive practice of them all, since it allows the translator to disregard the original message of the author to further the feminist reading of the resulting text, and it should be cautiously used.

In the same regard, a more novel venture opts for the substitution of sexist terms for neutral ones: inclusive language. It aims to avoid expressions that are biased or discriminate against individuals based on their sex, race or religion, among others. Once more, the translator would be able to choose among an array of alternatives that vary depending on the language. In fact, as Brufau (2011: 191-192) reports, nowadays there are numerous style guides edited by different institutions, such as governments, universities or private-owned businesses, that have been conceived to avoid sexist writing. Besides, their statistics regarding their usage have shown a drastic increase in the last decade given the concern to maintain political correctness. To illustrate some of these suggestions, it has been deemed appropriate to focus on the target language of the present study, this being Spanish. Therefore, the foundation FundéuRAE (2019), has compiled all the existing rules on inclusive language in Spanish. To refrain from incorrect usage of the generic masculine, they suggest: 1) doubling up to represent both masculine and feminine, 2) using collective nouns, and 3) modifying the usual gender desinences in favor of -@, -x or -e.

All this being said, gender translation has been – and still is today – heavily criticized due to its connection to feminist and queer translation. As occurs with the feminist and LGTB+ movements, some professionals believe that feminist and queer translations indoctrinate readers to forcefully make them agree with a set of ideas. Nevertheless, nothing could be further from the truth. Both types of translation share a common aim: granting visibility to realities and individuals who have traditionally been marginalized due to the ruling of heteropatriarchy. Seane (2009: 209-211) argues that, even if the advantages of feminist and queer practice in translation are numerous, the professionals within this field have to be cautious about not overshadowing male or heterosexual culture.

4. Linguistic and translation analysis of *Written on The Body*

Even though the linguistic and translation analysis of *Written on The Body* towards Spanish is a novelty, experts in other languages have previously tackled the study of the wintersonian masterpiece. Some of them emphasized the seemingly impossible task, such as the translation towards French (Schabert, 2010:90) and Bulgarian (Arman, 2012.:75), while others described the process as a regular transfer between languages, like the translation towards German (Schabert, 2010:90) and Turkish (Arman, 2012:76). Additionally, and contrarily to the previously mentioned professionals who merely assessed the intrinsic difficulty of transferring grammatical gender, Cordisco (2011:282-283) analyzes the text comparing it to a previous translation published in Italian to scrutinize the translation strategies that enable such complicated labor. Hence, this latter research does not only allow us to determine the complexity of the translation as all the others accomplished but also establishes a reference point to illustrate which aspects are the most challenging while translating from a language that lacks gender marks to a language that requires them.

Thus, following the contribution of Cordisco, a careful reading of the novel and a comparison of both the original work by Winterson and the translation by Gómez was performed. Three fragments were then selected, in all of which the protagonist was holding a conversation with Louise and adjectives were used to describe the couple. Given that the reader is uncertain about the sex and the gender of the leading character, the translator would face a case of gender ambiguity in English that would later need to be resolved to fulfill the necessary imposition of grammatical gender in Spanish. According to Leonardi (2013: 67), even though the translation of languages that require grammatical gender is a complicated endeavor, the

adaptation of original content could be achieved without major losses thanks to adequate strategies.

In this manner, based on the previous contributions, it was decided that the inclusion of compensating strategies would be necessary when discussing the proposal made by Gómez. Along these lines, the classification established by Malone (1988) would appear to be useful, given that they comprise sufficient variety to explain the choices that were made in the Spanish translation. These strategies, even if they could be subdivided into five groups – matching, zigzagging, recrescence, repackaging and reordering – are best understood as nine individual procedures: 1) equation, 2) substitution, 3) divergence, 4) convergence, 5) amplification, 6) reduction, 7) diffusion, 8) condensation and 9) reordering.

With all this in mind, all fragments will comprise similar content. Firstly, there will be a short contextualization of the scene to help the reader understand the situation. After that, the focus will be shifted towards the term or terms that imply a certain level of difficulty because of their gender ambiguity and the strategy used by Gómez will be discussed. Finally, an evaluation of the outcome will be conducted to assess if the Spanish proposal is acceptable or if it should be revised in future editions of the novel. Additionally, in the latter case, an alternative will be proposed.

The first fragment that has been chosen takes place in the early visits that the main character pays to Louise at her marital house, when their obsession grows rapidly and excessively, to the point of not being able to control their actions. After entering the building, both Louise and the protagonist find themselves in the kitchen, while Louise's husband is in another room, absorbed by a videogame.

Source text	Translation
'Are <u>we</u> going to have an affair?' she said.	–¿Vamos a tener una aventura? – preguntó.
She's not English, she's Australian.	Ella no es inglesa, es australiana.
'No, no <u>we're</u> not,' I said. 'You're married and I'm with Jacqueline. <u>We're</u> going to be <u>friends</u> .'	–No, ni hablar –dije–. Tú estás casada y yo estoy con Jacqueline. Esto será una <u>amistad</u> .
She said, 'We're <u>friends</u> already.' (Winterson, 1992:37)	–Ya es una <u>amistad</u> –dijo. (Winterson, 1998:41)

During the conversation, even if both characters express reluctance to commit infidelity, Winterson creates clear sexual tension in the atmosphere through the movements and gestures exhibited. Louise's delicate and

submissive attitude is opposed to that of the leading character, who have previously allowed themselves to fall prey to desire and lust but who have also only recently decided to be faithful and committed to their relationship with Jacqueline. However, it should be noted that the last of Louise's interventions displays some sadness or disappointment that disrupts her characteristic demeanor, thus showing her true intentions for the first time.

Furthermore, the choice of short and simple sentences could be used to prove the proximity and comfortability with one another, since they can express their thoughts without much explanation. Additionally, the writer opted for respecting the most traditional sentence structure, this being subject-verb-complements. These are notable wintersonian stylistic choices since the author reserves the usage of subordinate and complex sentences for sections with more intricate and deeper meanings. In *Written on The Body* this can be easily seen in the central part of the novel, where an array of technical terms is intertwined with lengthy and overtly complicated clauses.

Shifting the attention towards the translation, it can be appreciated that Gómez proposes a faithful transfer of the dialogue despite permitting herself to be more creative in certain instances to preserve the feigned orality of the text. For instance, she avoids repetition when translating "No, no we're not" and substitutes this expression for "ni hablar", a Spanish expression that conveys the same intensity. Therefore, thanks to this substitution/condensation, the translator does not only uphold the rotundity and clearness in the character's answer, but she also manages to present an alternative that would be better accepted by the native readers in the target culture.

Regarding the translation of the terms "we" and "friends", both of which precise the inclusion of grammatical gender in Spanish, the decisions taken by Gómez are considered wise. On the one hand, the first-person plural pronoun is omitted since in Spanish it is possible to build a sentence without the inclusion of these pronouns given that the verb includes desinences that help establish who they are referring to. In fact, in the first instance, this is precisely what occurs thanks to the addition of "vamos", the present first-person plural form of the verb "ir" (go). Nonetheless, in the second and third cases, the said pronoun is deduced in the Spanish version without the need for a literal expression of the people as a result of the context of the scene. These strategies permit the professional to solve one of the problems, since choosing the masculine "nosotros" or the feminine "nosotras" would imply a certain loss of meaning for the whole product.

On the other hand, the noun “friends” cannot be simply omitted because it has a more specific meaning than pronouns. In Spanish, it could be translated both as “amigos” if the protagonist was characterized as a male and “amigas” if they were otherwise described as female. Still, as it has been previously highlighted, no gender has been attributed to the main character and, thus the translator cannot be certain of either option. This is the reason why the expert chose to use a substitution, turning “amigos/amigas” into “amistad” (friendship). However, even though the selected strategy was a good choice, it may be necessary to combine other techniques to achieve a proposed translation which would seem natural within a dialogue to the target readers. Therefore, in conjunction with a substitution, an amplification is suggested to create more viable options. Consequently, a new version is proposed:

–¿Vamos a tener una aventura? –preguntó.
Ella no es inglesa, es australiana.
–No, ni hablar –dije–. Tú estás casada y yo estoy con Jacqueline. No será más que una amistad.
–¿Una mera amistad? –repitió.

In the present proposal, most of the published version was unmodified and the strategies that Gómez were respected. Withal, to guarantee a better-feigned orality, the last interventions of the protagonist and Louise were altered. In this sense, “no ser más que” (nothing more than) would be an acceptable interpretation of the original text while avoiding the usage of the complex “amigos/amigas” in the penultimate sentence. Moreover, in the last line of the dialogue, it has been considered appropriate to transform the enunciation into a question to extol the subtle sadness and disappointment previously mentioned and to add the adjective “mera” (mere) to accentuate these feelings. Additionally, seeing that Spanish speakers tend to infer information from the surrounding context, the original verb has also been omitted to stress the orality of the conversation. Although to compensate for the possible loss of content, the simplicity of the verb “decir” (say) is replaced by the preciseness of “repetir” (repeat).

The second fragment that has been analyzed takes place after the first sexual encounter between Louise and the main character. After having committed their respective infidelities, Louise starts feeling remorseful and the intimacy that they shared is transformed into intrusive thoughts of uncertainty. She doubts the honesty of her lover, hence sharing some traits with previous companions.

Source text	Translation
'When I said you might not mean it, I meant it might not be possible for you to mean it.'	–Cuando digo que quizá no vaya en serio, digo que quizá no te es posible decirlo en serio.
'I'm not <u>married</u> .'	–No <u>tengo un certificado de matrimonio</u> .
'You think that makes you <u>free</u> ?'	–¿Tú crees que eso te hace <u>libre</u> ?
'It makes me <u>freer</u> .'	–Me hace más <u>libre</u> .
'It also makes it easier for you to change your mind. [...]'	–Y también hace que te resulte más fácil cambiar de opinión. [...]
(Winterson, 1992:52)	(Winterson, 1998:57)

Since the preceding actions shine because of the exposed emotions, this conversation retains some of the passion that was experienced moments ago. As a consequence, this linguistic exchange is heavily marked by their feelings. On this occasion, Louise adopted a sceptical and defensive stance concerning the hero, even throwing at them some daggers. Contrarily, the protagonist answers with incredulity and feeling hurt due to the accusations that the person they love has brought.

The opposing standpoints of both characters can also be noticed thanks to their contrast within the morphosyntactic plane. Louise expresses her complex ideas using subordinate and coordinated sentences. This choice may be because Louise is well aware that she is attacking her lover but does not want to appear overly aggressive. Notwithstanding, it could also be a result of Louise needing to express her insecurities but, because of the avalanche of intrusive thoughts, not managing to convey them properly. Contrarily, the leading character replies using brief and simplistic clauses. This character feels uncomfortable when facing the accusations and tries to avoid answering the questions through evasiveness and ambiguity, a response that the reader is already familiar with from previous encounters with ex-partners.

Once again, it can be depicted how Gómez generally uses a literal translation technique to transfer the original content into Spanish. Nevertheless, when the expert must face a significant challenge, opting for a faithful translation is not sufficient, needing more creativity to overcome them. In the present fragment, no difficulties regarding pronouns or nouns can be encountered, but adjectives arise as a new problem.

In Spanish, there are two types of adjectives: adjectives with a unique ending and adjectives that have both masculine and feminine desinences. The former would not pose an obstacle, while the latter would require a more inventive approach. On this subject, the translation “free” can be easily

achieved since its Spanish equivalent, “libre”, works both in masculine and feminine contexts. Therefore, the gender ambiguity that surrounds the protagonist would not impede this equation. Contrariwise, the translation of “married” is a major issue. Neither “casado” nor “casada” would satisfy the needs of the source text so it is necessary to find an alternative. Additionally, the proposal of Gómez would not be considered appropriate because, even if the strategy of substituting the adjective for the noun could be viable, the context in which it is inscribed does not allow it. Furthermore, no Spanish speaker would naturally build such a sentence, especially in a conversation. With all this taken into consideration, a new proposal has been formulated:

- Cuando digo que quizá no vaya en serio, digo que quizá no te es posible decirlo en serio.
- No he dado el sí quiero.
- ¿Tú crees que eso te hace libre?
- Me hace más libre.
- Y también hace que te resulte más fácil cambiar de opinión. [...]

After carefully studying the Spanish translation, it was decided that Gómez translation was not completely erroneous. Indeed, the most logical change would be transforming the adjective into a noun marked by a specific gender independently of the identification of the characters. Withal, after exploring various possibilities within the lexical family of marriage, none of the options would fit nicely in this specific instance.

As a result, the semantic field of this same celebration started being considered. Two concepts were highlighted among the rest since they were common to most marriages: the rings and the acceptance of the new spouse through “I do”. The association of both elements to the ceremony is undisputable for any Spanish reader and that is why they both could constitute a possible translation. However, the most accurate option seemed to involve “sí quiero” (I do). As a result, in the previous translation, a strategy of indirect translation was applied to acclaim the aforementioned speech act and a completely new sentence was created.

The last selected fragment takes place shortly after the previous one. Nonetheless, there is a considerable separation in terms of pages between the two of them due to a reflexive break on the part of the main character. Their connection can be denoted thanks to the term “trophy hunting” and the temporal reference through the adverb “yesterday” given that, in the preceding scene, the protagonist asks Louise to take with them a piece of clothing that would remind them of the good memories that the couple created under the bedsheets. It is this question the one that leads into the

earlier fight. After some hours on their own, the lovers reunite and confess their feelings to one another.

Source text

'Yesterday you were angry with me, you accused me of trophy hunting and you told me not to declare my love to you until I had declared it to myself. You were right. Give me time to do the work I must do. Don't make it easy for me. I want to be sure. I want you to be sure.'

(Winterson, 1992:84)

Translation

–Ayer te enfadaste conmigo, me acusaste de ir a la caza de trofeos y me dijiste que no te declarase mi amor hasta que no me lo hubiera declarado a mí. Tenías razón. Dame tiempo para hacer lo que tengo que hacer. No me lo pongas fácil. Quiero la certeza. Quiero tu certeza. –dije.

(Winterson, 1998:92)

After the flood of memories that the narrative voice evokes during the night, the leading character starts feeling crushed by the weight of their sins and the necessity to expiate them through the relationship with Louise. Starting at this new conversation, the character takes responsibility for their murky past and their ignoble decisions, to a point that they describe themselves as a despicable person, an emotional nomad. For all these reasons, the reader realizes that their feelings for Louise are real and the conversation adopts a solemn and emotive tone between both characters. It should also be highlighted that this intervention represents the first time in which the hero puts the necessities of another person first instead of their pleasure.

Regarding grammar, a great contrast can be observed when comparing the first of the sentences and the rest of them, considering the former portrays a syntactic complexity improper of the character. So much so that in this sentence alone Winterson combines juxtaposition, coordination and subordination. Although, they shortly go back to their usual way of expressing themselves, characterized by the usage of short and simple clauses or a subtle degree of subordination. Therefore, some hints about the maturation that the hero is on the brink of experiencing are dropped.

Another relevant aspect that should be emphasized is the strong opposition concerning the used pronouns. While the central character begins their intervention using the second person singular pronoun "you" to refer to Louise, they soon change the rhythm of the discourse to place themselves in the spotlight. This egocentrism has governed the novel when referring to the mysterious protagonist so the readers would easily recognize them but, at the same time, the episodes in which a more empathetic approach is adopted could be interpreted as the development of the said character.

Lastly, about the grammatical aspects, it must be noted that the author chooses to include instances of repetition of adjectives and parallelism, namely “I want to be sure. I want you to be sure”. On this occasion, most adjectives are either used to talk about Louise or to refer to the situation in which the events unfold. As a result, the majority of them would not suppose a problem for the translator, given that their grammatical gender becomes evident. However, by adding the additional layer of parallelism, further challenges are to be faced.

Contrarily to the previous extracts, even if Gómez’s translation still reflects faithfulness to the original text, the Spanish version adapts several expressions to make it sound natural to the Spanish reader. Unsurprisingly, this outburst of creativity had to be applied to the translation of the aforementioned parallelism, but it was also implemented to substitute some of the other adjectives through strategies of divergence and substitution. For example, even though it is possible to create expressions with the adjective “enfadada” (angry), Gómez considered it better to verbalize the said adjective, which would seem a legitimate choice for the target audience. Additionally, the translation of “right” and “easy” do not pose a problem thanks to the strategy of equation.

Nevertheless, as was anticipated, in the case of “sure” the situation is considerably trickier because of the need to achieve a proposal with an almost equal grammatical structure. Gómez rightly separates herself from the adjectives “seguro” and “segura” to preserve gender ambiguity. She probably explored different alternatives within the lexical family and concluded that none of the options would suit the target culture’s expectations. As a result, the translator had to examine valid synonyms and their corresponding linguistic fields, selecting “cierto” and “cierta” (certain) as the closest possible equivalent. Moreover, she nominalized the adjectives to avoid the genderization of the term, achieving a decent proposition. Withal, despite recognizing the hardship of this particular extract, it is considered that a less artificial translation could be accomplished:

–Ayer te enfadaste conmigo, me acusaste de ir a la caza de trofeos y me dijiste que no te declarase mi amor hasta que no me lo hubiera declarado a mí. Tenías razón. Dame tiempo para hacer lo que tengo que hacer. No me lo pongas fácil. No quiero dudar. No quiero que dudes. –dije.

Equally to Gómez, the suggested rendering was created thanks to the examination of different lexical families. Initially, the possibility of using the verbalized version of “seguro” (sure), “asegurarse” (ensure), was contemplated and, even though it would be a valid alternative, the

parallelism between both sentences would be somehow obscured due to the presence of additional pronouns in the latter clause. As a result, new factors were considered. Thus, the attention shifted towards the usage of antonyms, specifically “dudoso” (hesitant). Notwithstanding, given that this Spanish adjective presents a double termination, either the verb or the noun should be used instead. And, even though both alternatives could be applied without much complication, the former was chosen to illustrate the suggested modifications.

4.1. *Alternative strategies*

In the case of facing a translation marked with gender ambiguity, the translator could also contemplate the possibility of attributing a specific gender to the wintersonian character. In this peculiar case, the professional could be influenced by the context of the literary movements and ideologies in which the author is forcefully inscribed and her life and, consequently, they could make the mistake of associating the leading character with a woman figure as if it was an autobiographic novel. Contrarily, the specialist could also be swayed by the stereotypes about sex and desire and by the fact that the vast majority of sexual partners of the protagonist are women and identify them as a man. As Mills (2016:75) affirms, both results are a direct aftermath of a gendered reading.

Furthermore, even if the associations with the masculine and the feminine are the most prevalent, they are not merely limited to a binomial operation. There is a wide range of identifications that deviate from the standards of man and woman that could be used to characterize the hero. For example, it could be the case of a fluid-gendered or a non-binary character. Therefore, the assignation of a particular grammatical gender to the character would signify the omission of one of the most distinguishable traits of the work and the invisibility of several realities.

However, it could be argued that the application of alternative strategies could convey some advantages, despite ignoring some traits of the original text. For instance, since *Written of The Body* was initially criticized in Great Britain for not adopting a feminist approach, a rewriting of the novel in other languages could solve this by applying feminist translations strategies to achieve the activist role that was pursued by the author, this being the reflection on the false immobility of classic gender roles and the freedom of desire. Amongst them, hijacking is possibly the most useful one in this particular situation because it allows to deliberately characterize the protagonist as a woman to raise awareness of a traditionally

marginalized minority: bisexual and lesbian women. Castro (2008:295) defines it as a strategy in which

the translator takes over a text with non-feminist intentions thanks to the introduction of neologisms [...]; the inclusion of changes that have no relation with the original version; the substitution of a generic masculine for a generic feminine or another inclusive form; the inversion of sexist elements; the creation of parody; etc.

On the one hand, this approach would benefit the translation given that a feminine voice would be placed in a powerful position, being both the narrator and the main character of the story. On the other hand, this decision would ignore the rest gender identities that could be hidden behind the purportedly created ambiguity.

Another strategy that has been examined to solve gender ambiguity in the Spanish translation was the usage of inclusive language, particularly the substitution of gendered terminations for the highly controversial termination – e. Despite Spanish linguistic authorities advising against the rupture of these fixed grammatical norms, the possibility of translating every noun and adjective within the text with a unique desinence, regardless of the gender identity and the sexual orientation of the hero, would solve any problem on this matter. Moreover, while Castro (2008:296) proposes the usage of parenthesis, slashes, hyphens, capital letters, at symbols and double terminations, the suffix – e is considered to be the most viable option to mark neutral gender due to the difficulty of incorporating the others in the final product whilst keeping the readability of the text. Lastly, another argument in favor of this atypical suffixation could be that it would create controversy, which was one of the predominant objectives of the original novel. After all, as von Flotow (2005:48) affirms, “the focus on gender, and more recently, on its diversification or pluralization, may be attractive and stimulating for some; for others, it threatens unity, tradition, belief systems, and power structures”

The latter translation strategy could benefit the queer movement. It would not only be feasible to identify the leading character as non-heterosexual but also some traditionally ignored sexual and gender identifications, such as non-binary and fluid gender individuals, would be acclaimed. Additionally, there is an ideological current that defends that some texts, like the one that is studied within the present research, could be considered “transgender texts”. According to Casagrande (2013:115-116), these texts can be defined as those that “present a non-dichotomous use of linguistic gender” and distinguishes three types of texts: 1) texts playing with gendered forms of address and reference, where female forms are employed with male referents and vice versa [...]; 2) texts using epicene neologisms [...]; and 3) texts introducing genderless characters and/or

narrators. *Written on The Body* would then belong to the third category and it presents added difficulties when translating. Likewise, Leonardi (2013:65) quotes Lanser to advocate for the adscription of the novel within the queer movement, guaranteeing that *Written on The Body* “is a queer novel with a queer plot as it transgresses and transcends the established norms of gender, sex and sexuality through references to alternative sexualities”.

5. Conclusions

As it can be deduced by the reading of the present article, the translation of grammatical gender becomes especially complex when the linguistic transfer occurs between languages that do not share a similar reflection of the said trait, for example, English and Spanish. Furthermore, the level of difficulty increases when the original text is marked by a certain degree of gender ambiguity, either intentional or unintentional. Within this research, the problems that were identified were mainly connected to nouns, pronouns and adjectives, the word classes that require the usage of both grammatical gender and number. Also, some expressions with gender connotations can be pinpointed throughout the novel, but they do not pose such an obstacle for the translator because they are usually stereotypes that could be easily reflected in the target culture. Nonetheless, if there was a notable difference regarding these conceptions of manhood and womanhood between both cultures, they could pose a dilemma for the translation professional too. All of these, combined with the complications derived from the dialogical nature of the text, the necessity of creating feigned orality and the preservation of the style of the author and the development of the characters, would result in an arduous task.

To solve the aforementioned challenges, the translator could resort to certain translation strategies. As it has been observed, the most recurrent ones involved indirect translation, namely substitution, condensation and amplification, combined with some degree of creativity that enables the modification of certain terms to create natural expressions in the target culture without losing any significant content. Finally, it could be beneficial to reconsider the discussed non-traditional translation strategies, such as the hijacking of the original text or the usage of the neutral suffix – e. Even if they would modify the initial intentionality of Winterson, they would enable a representation of the minorities that the author aimed to evoke throughout the gender ambiguity of the main character. Withal, the latter techniques would only be valid in specific projects in which the translator has total freedom or in which the editor or the publisher instructs the professional to manipulate the content.

To conclude, research on gender ambiguity and its translation should be continued by extrapolating it to other novels that have been translated into different languages. For example, some novels that tackle the topic of the subversion of conventional gender roles include *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, *Myra Breckinridge* by Gore Vidal or *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, among many others. Additionally, this study should not be limited to narrative works but must be expanded to other genres and formats.

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